

Meeting: Children, Education and Skills Committee

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Title: Poverty Intervention Fund Update

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Service: Corporate Strategy

Ward affected: All

1. Report Purpose and Background

1.1 As requested by the Children, Education and Skills Committee, this report provides an update on the use and spend of the Poverty Intervention Fund.

1.2 The purpose of the Fund as agreed by Cabinet on 29 June 2020 is to help to alleviate the impact of poverty on families and individuals across North Tyneside with particular emphasis on children, by providing support to those who need it. Cabinet agreed the following policy objectives for the Fund

- to address the financial impacts of poverty by targeting support to areas where people are struggling to make ends meet to be able to afford the basics or where they are having to go without certain things which others take for granted.
- to address the social impacts of poverty by targeting support so that people can play a full role in society and for activities which will have a positive impact
- to address the health impacts of poverty by targeting support on relevant areas such as risk-taking behaviour and mental health and well-being

1.3 On 21 September 2020, Cabinet agreed the approach for the delivery of the Fund. The delivery of the Fund is overseen by a Steering Group comprised of 1 elected member per ward (with appropriate arrangements for mixed wards) and also to include engagement with the Young Mayor/Youth and relevant external organisations.

1.4 On 21 September 2020, Cabinet also agreed the first priorities and initiatives for the Fund as proposed by the Steering Group. These were to deliver the Fund in a phased approach with the first phase focussed on four priorities

- for children – focusing on the key impact which living in poverty has in relation to their experience at school
- for older people – focusing on the key impact of not taking up full benefit entitlement

- for families with children – focusing on the key impact of not being able to afford the essentials of clothing for school and food during school holidays (where they do not have access to free school meals)

1.5 In line with these agreed priorities, the Fund has financed the following initiatives in the 2020/21 financial year. An update on progress of each is set out in section 3 of the report

- Poverty Proofing the School Day (for children)
- benefit advice and support for older residents (for older people)
- school appropriate clothing (for families with children)
- holiday food (for families with children)
- Food for older residents (for older people)

1.6 An update is also included in this report on the additional support that has been provided through the COVID Winter Grant which was introduced as part of the Government's package of support due to COVID-19. The Winter Grant payment is an additional payment which was made to school aged children on free school meals and has supported the delivery of the aims of the Poverty Intervention Fund to address the needs of families with children.

1.7 Information is also provided on the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) which has also been introduced as part of the Government's package of support due to Covid-19 and again has supported the delivery of the aims of the Poverty Intervention Fund

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Children, Education and Skills Committee is asked to note the content of this report.

3. Update on Progress

3.1 Appendix A provides an overview of the allocation of funding within the PIF and spend to date. Set out below is an overview of the current progress with each of the PIF initiatives and the related work with the additional Government grant funding provided to the Authority – the COVID Winter Grant and the Holiday Activity Fund. Unallocated funding from 2020-21 will be carried forward into 2021-22 as per the budget proposals agreed by Council.

Poverty Proofing the School Day

3.2 £172,755 was allocated from the Poverty Intervention Fund for this initiative in order to address the impacts of poverty felt by children and young people at school. The poverty proofing programme has been run by Children North East since 2011 and has been successfully previously delivered in a few schools in the borough (funded directly by schools) Delivered through schools, the programme seeks to better understand what poverty looks like from a child and young person's perspective. Each school involved is fully supported to be able to put in place an action plan to alleviate this in the school setting and to reduce the stigma and discrimination faced by children who live in poverty. Funding the programme through the Poverty

Intervention Fund means that every school in the borough is able to take part and there is a consistent experience for our children and young people.

- 3.3 Success outcomes for the programme include more equity of experience, opportunity and learning outcomes for pupils who live in poverty. It also leads to positive outcomes for parents, schools, and teachers. Where the programme has already been implemented in schools there are improved rates of attendance and attainment for disadvantaged pupils as well as a direct impact by reducing the cost of the school experience for pupils and their families, thereby alleviating some of the pressures on parents in poverty. Where the programme has been delivered there have also been improvements in relation to mental health and wellbeing amongst children and young people. Schools have implemented actions such as free musical instrument tuition for all pupils, supplying bus passes, alternatives to non-uniform days for fund-raising, not sending debt letters home with pupils and challenging staff over whether asking pupils to write about their holidays or presents was appropriate. However, one of the biggest impacts for schools is a cultural shift. One school told evaluators that previously, they had done things without 'necessarily being aware of what the impact on disadvantaged pupils would be', but that after the programme, they 'now consider the impact first'.
- 3.4 By making the initiative borough wide, it takes into account the fact that in North Tyneside whilst there are certain parts of the borough which are more deprived than others, there are also children living in poverty in the more affluent areas. This approach gives the same opportunity to all children and young people across the borough regardless of where they live.
- 3.5 The programme, delivered by Children North East, was due to start in the Autumn of 2020 and a working group has been set up with the Council's School Improvement Service to oversee delivery. Information was sent to schools and initial discussions were held. Due to pressures on school in relation to the pandemic, the timing of the programme had to be moved back to 2021. Children North East has adapted the programme so that it can be delivered in a Covid Secure way. Four schools have now started on the programme with another four lined up to follow. This programme will now run through from now and all of the 2021/22 academic year to ensure that no school is disadvantaged due to the impact of COVID.

Benefit take-up campaign and support for older residents

- 3.6 £100,000 was allocated from the Poverty Intervention Fund for a benefit take up campaign and support for older residents. This is to address the issue that impacts of living in poverty for some individuals and families is compounded by people not taking up their full entitlement to benefits. This is recognised in particular for older people (and especially for older people with disabilities) who often struggle to navigate the often-complex system of benefits and allowances or for whom, the digital nature of benefits administration and claiming processes are not always easy to access.
- 3.7 Delivered through Age UK and Citizens Advice, this initiative includes raising awareness and providing information to people of what benefit support is available through proactive communications and marketing activity. It also includes advice

workers to work directly with older people to understand their potential entitlement to benefit as well as supporting them to make a claim.

3.8 Table 1 below shows the breakdown of spend for this initiative

Table 1

	Amount of funding
CAB provision of advice	£45,000
AgeUK provision of advice	£45,000
AgeUK Marketing and communication	£10,000

School appropriate clothing

3.9 £253,845 has been allocated from the Poverty Intervention Fund to support families with the costs of school clothing – uniform, coats and shoes. Families with children who are living in poverty often struggle to be able to afford the regular costs for school uniforms, shoes or winter coats and that this can contribute significantly to the key impacts of poverty. This can be a particular issue where schools require their own branded items of clothing to be worn as part of their uniform policy. Part of the funding was used to provide £45 directly to families for every pupil in receipt of free school meals due to low income. This is being provided through a locally managed scheme where vouchers) are provided for parents and carers to be able to purchase the clothing for school. Vouchers of £20 per pupil have been provided for use at the eight school uniform suppliers across the borough (for branded uniform items) and vouchers of £25 per pupil have been provided for use in supermarkets which supply school clothing. This provides both flexibility and choice for families but also ensures that the funding is directly provided for clothing as much as possible.

3.10 Additional access to school clothing over and above the £45 per pupil has also been provided for families in need via the Community School Clothing Scheme. This is able to be accessed through schools and we have been working closely with schools to identify those in need.

Holiday food

3.11 £200,000 of the Poverty Intervention Fund was allocated to provide support for families to meet the costs of food during school holidays. During the October 2020 half term school holiday, we carried out a market engagement exercise to trial several ways to provide holiday food to children. The trial saw 5 providers delivering food and activities to children on free school meals. Through this, over 1,700 meals were delivered either face to face or remotely through hamper provision. The total cost of this activity was £6,646.

3.12 In November 2020, the government announced the COVID Winter Grant which was to support those most in need by providing support over the winter to children and households who are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, poverty, where they are impacted by the ongoing public health emergency and where alternative sources of assistance may be unavailable. By using this funding for holiday food, we were able to redirect the remainder of the amount originally allocated for this

purpose in the Poverty Intervention Fund to extend the school clothing scheme and also to provide funding for food for older people over winter.

Winter food for older people

- 3.13 By redistributing the funding originally allocated for holiday food (which had been provided elsewhere through the COVID Winter Grant, £96, 681 was available from the PIF to support the provision of hot food for older people. This began over the Christmas period and continued until end March 2021.
- 3.14 This funding has enabled 8 voluntary and community sector projects to deliver over 8,000 hot meals. Residents have benefitted from extra contact and support from projects delivering food, so this initiative has also contributed to a reduction in social isolation amongst older people through the lockdown period.

4. Impact of COVID Grants on the PIF

- 4.1 The £170 million COVID Winter Grant Scheme was made available in early December 2020 for support costs of food, energy, water bills (including sewerage) and other essentials. North Tyneside Council was allocated £644,988 and this was able to be used instead of the PIF to support families with children in receipt of free school meals. £60 was allocated per child and the funding was provided to families at Christmas. It is intended to cover the holiday periods for the rest of the financial year. This equated to £15 per week for the two weeks at Christmas, February half term and the first week of the Easter break. Recently this grant was extended to cover the second week of Easter so a further £15 has been provide for all eligible children.
- 4.2 Government recently announced additional funding to local authorities to provide for holiday activities via the Holiday Activity Fund. North Tyneside's allocation of this fund is £788k. This holiday provision is for children who are entitled to benefits-related free school meals. Work is currently underway to develop the model for the delivery of school holiday activities across North Tyneside in line with the criteria for the Government funding. This will also contribute to addressing the policy priorities identified for the PIF.

5. Background Information

The following background documents have been used in the compilation of this report and are available from

- [Poverty Intervention Fund Cabinet Paper June 2020](#)
- [Poverty Intervention Fund Cabinet Paper September 2020](#)

APPENDIX A

Initiative	Funding Allocated	Comments
Benefits Take up Campaign and Support	100k	
Holiday food	200k* original allocation but only £6,646 spend	£6,646 spend prior to additional funding from Government. £193,362 reallocated to school appropriate clothing initiative and food for older people as set out below
Poverty Proofing the School Day	£172,755	
School appropriate clothing	£253,845 original allocation plus £96, 677	This amount was allocated based on the number of children eligible for free school meals. At the time of allocation this was 5,641 children but this has since risen to 6,625 children
Food for older people	£96,677	
Total	£726,600	
Remaining funds	£273,400	Balance to be carried forward to 2021/22 as per the budget agreed by Council